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AT HOME IN MONTEREY: THE WAY WE WERE

by Pam Bane

"In our hut, the children use the two slanting-ceiling bedrooms, the kitchen is 'standing room only,' and the living room serves as hallway, playroom, dining room, study for my husband, as well as bedroom for us grownups. I herewith cordially invite the Evening Capitol to inspect my home—please stagger your visits to two people at a time because we are so crowded." The invitation was extended by a very daring Navy wife, considering it was the era of white gloves and afternoon teas. She went so far as to sign her name, "Elaine Laessle." "Hut" was not meant to express fondness, as in "my humble abode," but referred to an actual hut—a metal World War II Quonset hut, divided into units for Postgraduate School families at Annapolis.

Elaine's was one of an avalanche of letters that fell upon the editor's desk at the Annapolis Evening Capitol, in response to his March 31, 1951, front-page editorial. Airing his views on the move of the Postgraduate School to Monterey, he'd called the family housing assigned to these students "adequate." Plans for new Navy engineering and laboratory buildings at the California campus were "reckless spending," and "a waste of public funds." In sum, "the Navy cannot justifiably ask for millions [of dollars] to replace a school that can continue to function well at its present location."

Assistant Professor Francis Pulliam challenged the editor's view of "functioning well" by writing "the crowded conditions at the school give the teachers, and students alike, no quiet for their preparations and research and makes many projects impossible."

Ready . . .

Rear Admiral Ernest E. Herrmann, champion of the proposed school in Monterey, had fought this battle in the D.C. political arena for more than a year. He also understood the local community's reluctance to lose 500 upstanding Navy families all at once. Taking two weeks to meet with local business and community leaders, he eased their fears and explained the necessity of the move, and by December, could announce "Annapolis has looked upon our departure with kindness and wished us well."

Set . . .

The move to California had been eagerly anticipated by the Postgraduate School students and faculty. They'd postponed their two-month Summer vacation in order to take leave when final negotiations were finished. Chalk floor plans of homes the men planned to build in Monterey appeared and multiplied on any unused blackboard space. A Monterey Realtor, John Sayers, "struck it rich" over a 3-day weekend trip to Annapolis. He sold 62 Del Rey Terrace homes—sight unseen—to Postgraduate School students and faculty.

LT "Budd" Salsig, and seven of his An-



napolis classmates pooled resources—financial, mental and physical—after Budd made a whirlwind weekend trip to Monterey to check out their real estate options. It seemed that two four-unit buildings, if they did the work themselves, would give them each the most home for their money. The group legally incorporated, and the Los Gallos Apartments began to take shape on an Annapolis chalkboard.

Meanwhile, the Monterey Peninsula prepared to accommodate the 500 new Postgraduate School families. The community was accustomed to having a new Navy General Line School class arrive each January since 1947, and the postgraduate Aerological Engineering Dept. from Annapolis had arrived in 1948. The usual appeal went out to local landlords to list available houses and apartments with the Navy housing office. But this time, there would be the usual Line School students, 400 of which would need family housing (approximately 100 students would take rooms in the BOQ), plus the 500 new Postgraduate families.

Go! . . .

Late in December, the move was on. Approximately 120 moving vans containing household goods, 66 freight cars, several planes, and a few ships loaded with school and laboratory equipment headed west. The families said farewell to East coast friends and relatives, and were finally on their way to the Monterey Peninsula.

The Los Gallos Apartments seemed to grow up out of the mud in the artichoke patch near the Carmel River Bridge. By spring, the families had moved in. The men, all in the same curriculum, had an instant carpool, and easily consulted each other on class assignments. With thirteen children in all, there was never a lonesome child to be seen. The original plans called for the addition of a swimming pool, at least until six-year-old Winter Salsig looked out at the rain one day, and asked "why do we need a swimming pool?"

Other students and their families had set up housekeeping wherever they could find it. They rented houses in Carmel, Monterey, and other parts of the Peninsula, arranging carpools whenever possible. The general consensus was that housing here was too expensive; many were paying twice their housing allowance for rent and utilities, and there was talk of rent de-control. La Mesa Village had 135 completed Wherry Act Housing units by June, 1952, and all were occupied by Line school families and families attached to the Naval Auxiliary Air Station. Another 388 units were slated, and were designated for Postgraduate School families.

Back to School

Life as a student at NPS in the Fifties wasn't much different than life as a NPS student today; they wore suits (and bow ties) to school four days a week, and their uniforms on Fridays. A typical Engineering School student, a 28-year old Naval Lieutenant, recently an aviator over Korea, was interviewed by the Monterey Herald. After spending eight hours a day in class, he had five hours of homework to do each night. He commented that the adjustment was "plenty rough after being out of school for seven years."

"Chatter"

Once the families were settled into life on the Peninsula, announcements of new addresses were a regular feature of Cary Giet's column "Navy Chatter" in the Monterey Peninsula Herald. Entries included Wives' Clubs news and activities, announcements of new homes or new addresses, and reports of recent dinner parties and picnics. There were interviews with staff wives, often including their favorite recipes. New babies were announced, of course, and houseguests introduced. Detailed descriptions of children's birthday parties were frequent. Mrs. Giet's columns kept the wives informed, and also served as a friendly introduction to Monterey residents and businesses of the huge group of young service members and their families; the ones who clogged the neighborhood streets with moving vans on a regular basis, crowded the schools with their children, and whom they were expected to welcome with open arms.

Then and Now

The wives clubs then, as now, were much more than social diversions. However, the activities were constant in the Fifties—Bridge and Canasta nights, luncheons and dinner parties, and formal holiday balls, besides the regular club meetings. Every wife belonged to a wives' club; the General Line School Students' Wives' Club, The Women's Club of the Naval

Postgraduate School, or The Engineering Students' Wives' Club. There was also the Staff Wives Club. The clubs served as an educational and recreational network too; there were choral groups, literary groups, and arts and crafts groups besides riding, bowling, golf and tennis groups. The drama group produced an annual community play, and the proceeds benefitted local charities. The women sewed for Navy Relief, and volunteered at local churches and at the Red Cross.

Cary Giet never mentioned exactly how the women managed to keep up and still have time for extra activities. They served three square meals a day, all from scratch (no free-delivery pizza or frozen dinners, even in a pinch), then did the dishes in the sink. Cotton shirts and tablecloths (no Perma-press) had to be washed, hung on the line, starched and ironed. So many things have changed in the past forty years and so many things have stayed the same.

Elaine Laessle must have done a little victory dance when she and her family were given their "move out" date. Whatever they moved into when they arrived in Monterey, we can be sure it wasn't a quonset hut. It would be satisfying to know that the Laessles built a beautiful home in Pacific Grove, or that they lived in our own La Mesa Village when it was new.

Has anyone heard from Elaine? . . . or the Salsigs? They were once new to NPS, and to Monterey . . . the way we were.

Author's Note: Special thanks to Deputy Director of the Public Affairs Office

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BLAST FROM THE PAST

In her column "Navy Chatter," Cary Giet interviewed Mrs. Charles Crombe, wife of Admiral Herrmann's Chief-of-Staff, on August 14, 1952. She offered this favorite recipe to readers:

Beaten Biscuits

Stir together:

- 4 cups flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon soda

With two knives, cut in:

- 2 tablespoons shortening

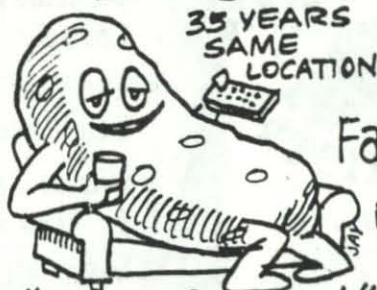
Add, to make stiff dough:

- 1/2 cup cold milk
- 1/2 cup ice water

Turn onto a board and knead thoroughly. Then beat with the far end of a rolling pin until the dough blisters and cracks, about 30 minutes (Mrs. Crombe was a true pioneer in the field of NPS stress reduction; learn from this). Keep dough in a thick mass by folding it over each two or three whacks with the rolling pin (That ought to do it; but to get biscuits too, continue on). Roll dough 1/3 to 1/2 inch thick, and cut biscuits 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Prick 3 times with a four-prong fork. Bake in moderate oven, 375 degrees, for 30 minutes, until light beige in color. Yields 32 biscuits (and/or an inner sense of well-being).

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